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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reasons why few women are found in administrative positions in education. After exploring employment and promotion barriers to women under the categories of societal, economic, and power sharing, the paper recommends that women in education (1) receive more support in training programs; (2) become more visible by being elected to decision-making offices; (3) serve on selection committees for professional organizations and local boards of education; (4) receive announcements of job openings at the same time men do; (5) receive backup support from the system as beginning administrators; and (6) help to develop long-range goals for achieving women's equity in education. (Author/LD)

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The Other Half of the Talent Bank:
Women Administrators

Marilyn Neidig

Inequality between the sexes is currently the source of many heated debates and has been drowned in a mass of documentation. However, the majority agree that leadership in the world of work has been an exclusively male calling, and women have not been invited or seriously considered.

In the United States all professions are sex-typed. Nurses, social workers and teachers have been overwhelming women; law, medicine, the ministry, engineering and educational administration have been male professions. Teaching is a "female" occupation. This was not always the case. In Colonial days men filled the positions of primary school teaching. With the shortage of men at the time of the Civil War women were recruited. Women eventually predominated in the field and with this shift came the labeling of teaching as a low status profession, sometimes referred to as a semi-profession (12). In the last 10 years, the number of male teachers increased at a rate of 59 percent while female teachers increased only 37 percent. The most dramatic increase has been at the secondary level with a 67 percent increase in male teachers. In the same period, the male teacher increase was 39 percent in the elementary schools (12:13). The desire for increasing the number of men stems from the prevalent lore that the heavy predominance of women in our schools causes our male students to be feminized. More importantly, many educators feel that teaching will not become a leading profession until the proportion of men to women is drastically increased (4:60).

According to the NEA men are now a majority of the teaching population at the secondary level. The same phenomena occurs in administration. Only 13.5 percent of the nation's principals are female, down from 37 percent in 1960.

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Between 1950-51 and 1961-62, the 12 percent women junior high and six percent senior high principals sank to 3.8 percent for all secondary schools. Today only 2.9 percent of the junior high principals and less than two percent of the senior high principals are women. Even in the elementary schools where women represent 85 percent of the teachers only 18 percent of the principalships are held by women. Less than one half percent of the superintendents are women (13:9).

Having viewed the distribution of power in the whole profession over the past decades, we recognize that men are clearly gaining a disproportionate share of control. To summarize these data, in the field of education women "predominate" in number but men dominate in power.

Why is it that women have been only reluctantly admitted into the higher rank of education? Have the performances of these few women at the top been poor? Is the threat of their dropping out for childbearing the major deterrent to placing young women in a top level work position? Are there no women prepared for promotion?

The employment and promotion barriers for women cluster into three categories: societal, economic and power sharing.

The barriers listed under societal are part myth and part factual.

As stated earlier teaching has been sex-typed as female. However, while female occupations such as teaching have become male oriented: male occupations such as administration continues to be resistant to female entry. Sex-typing in education will be reduced not by offering greater inducements to bring men into the profession (such as extra salaries for coaching) but by broadening the alternatives for women. As opportunities for entry into all occupations at all levels open up, women's energies will be less focused on teaching, and the profession will be less dominated by women (4:60-61).

Sex-typing also exists within schools. Women teach English and foreign language and men teach math, science and the social sciences. In physical education, vocational, commercial, and industrial art classes men instruct the boys and women teach the girls(quoted in 5:207). There is also a segregation by stratification in our schools. Men become the supervisors, or take over the more prestigious positions and the women are fixed in the helper and service roles where they are responsible for carrying out decisions of their supervisors (4:4).

Climbing the career ladder in education means getting out of the classroom. Leaving the classroom implies moving into an administrative position. Few women are advancing and their number has been steadily declining.

Richard and Ida Simpson believe that women are more interested in fulfilling their sex roles as wife and mother than following a career, whereas men enter the field of teaching in search of a lifetime commitment(14:217). This is implying that women will marry and dropout to have children. Holmstrom's study of career patterns of husbands and wives who were professionals found that as many men as women had interrupted their careers.... but for different reasons. The men were away from work for military service, the women to raise children(8:521).

The National Education Association reports the number of women with a break in service has dropped from more than half of all women to a third (13). Thus this argument for not promoting women to administrative positions is outmoded.

It is true that men are sometimes more career goal oriented but even that is changing. Society has stipulated that men are the bread winners and therefore must be educated and establish their career choices early in life. Twenty-five years ago the few women who were educated didn't really know why. Some believed it was to be a better wife and mother. Yet some of the best wives and mothers we know were our grandmothers many having no education at all.

It is believed that administrative positions are too stressful for women to handle. Education ignores the biological research data that states the female species is stronger than the male in times of stress. Yet further we know that men in the top echelon of positions are the longest living. Supreme court justices never die!! (so much for awesome responsibility).

Women are receiving mixed signals from society. Institutions of higher education are enrolling women for advanced programs but when position choices are made they are being passed over. Women are at the present time receiving 48 percent of all the Masters Degrees and 20 percent of the Doctorates granted in higher education (11). "A qualified female applicant can not be found" simply will not suffice any longer.

Why are women not more aggressive in obtaining positions? The major reason is fear. A frequently asked question is why are so many women opposed to equal rights? Equal rights brings responsibility and change, and society has given women reinforcement that says you cannot compete. Women moving into administrative positions are usually considerably older than their male counterparts. Men advance faster with less experience simply because they are men. Hoyle and Randall found that 67 percent of the male principals have less than six years of elementary classroom experience prior to promotion to the elementary principalship while 88 percent of the female principals after six or more years of elementary teaching (cited in 8:4). Gross and Trask found that as many as 34 percent of the male principals in their study had never taught in an elementary school while only three percent of women principals did not have this experience(9:4). Society reinforces the idea that with age men are maturing or ripening but women are getting old or rotting.

Advancement frequently indicates a need to return to school for additional training. Older women may find this a frightening experience. Financial support is usually not given to women, and career counseling is either negative or not given at all.

Dr. Estelle Ramey, M.D. of Georgetown University relates a true story of a bright female medical student who wanted to be a surgeon. The student went to the head of the surgery department to state her desire only to be told you don't want to do that; surgery is a man's work. He simply could not give any other reason. Being bright and self confident she said, "Well I am still interested and would like to observe you in surgery tomorrow." Being extremely flattered the doctor said of course you may observe but why me? The young woman replied, "Well I am anxious to observe where in the process of surgery it is necessary to use your penis!"

This case may be a bit extreme but the reasons for not advancing women in education are also extreme. Society simply does not recognize the worth of women. Women are born with higher potential for linguistic ability and manual dexterity than men. However, the only response to those attributes is that she talks too much and she should be good at typing or perhaps sewing.

Could we have higher achievement scores in reading and English if more women were in leadership roles? I believe the answer is probably yes. Several research studies conducted in the "50's and "60's" indicate there is little substantiated evidence for the notion that men perform better the leadership role of the principalship. Results of a Florida study as well as the findings of a follow-up one year later showed that women operated democratically more often than men(11:21 ; 5:13). When parents were invited to rate the schools' effectiveness and the principal's qualities, the schools with women principals rated better than those with men.

The Hemphill, Griffiths and Frederiksen research conducted on a nationwide basis found that administrators and teachers rated women principals higher than men on on-the-job performance(11:22). Gross and Trask found that the performance of teachers was better and student achievement was higher in schools administered by women principals (9:12). Hoyle and Randall reported that teachers described female administrators as noticing potential problem situations and as evaluating results of action significantly more often than male administrators(cited in 9). Morsink showed that male principals outscored women principals on only one dimension of leadership behavior, tolerance of freedom(5:6). Since women principals scored higher on all other dimensions of leadership behavior, Morsink states that there is no justification for the argument that men are better suited than women to the task of the secondary school principalship.

A Purdue University study reveals that extent of sex bias in evaluating the performance of female administrators. One hundred thirty college students at Purdue rated identical pre-recorded performances of men and women who answered a list of 25 questions. Although both men and women answered the same 16 questions correctly, men received higher performance ratings. Students also judged the answers as revealing skill for the men and a combination of skill and luck for the women. Finally, men were rated superior in intelligence, based on their responses but women were not (16). The implications are staggering! Even though a man and a woman perform an identical job equally well, they will not be judged to be equally competent and equally qualified for higher positions.

Women are not aggressive in pursuing administrative jobs because of fear of failing or being perceived as failing. Women are not allowed to use failure as a learning and developing experience. Their entire career may be destroyed. The risk is extremely high! Most of my working years

have been in a man's world of administration. If I were to group the men I have worked with together there would be a few brilliant administrators; a few incompetent clods who should have been fired; and a large majority of plodding along one step at a time, but making progress administrators. It is my guess that if equal numbers of women were in the profession that the distribution of women would not be significantly different. However, if we took the top achievers of both men and women great strides could be made in education.

Because of "self-doubt, self-depreciation and a built-in bias about the inherent inferiority of women relative to men in decision-making and leadership", (7:11) many women see themselves as unable to perform effectively or to be happy in such roles. And as long as women feel inferior to the job or think they won't be happy, they will not seek it(10:215). In studies done in the early '70's by Grace Baruch, women were asked to describe themselves in terms of traits commonly associated with "femininity" and "masculinity". The feminine characteristics included "timed", "kind", and "dependent". Masculine traits were "logical", "independent" and "aggressive". The women who saw themselves as the most feminine were also the lowest in self-esteem, whereas those who saw themselves as high on masculine traits were also high in self-esteem (1).

The present day proponents of inequality are often urbane, sophisticated, and highly educated. The feeling of many of these proponents is that women have moved too fast in their struggle for equality. The resurgence of anti-women attitudes must be taken in the context of the country's economic and political problems. At a time of demands for tax relief, dissatisfaction with student performance in schools, declining enrollments and public schools closing; the idea of expanding the talent pool is frightening to men. The economic crunch is compounded by the demands of women and minority groups that have always served as a ballast in the economy.... carried along in times of plenty and discarded in a time of crisis.

Women feel successful when promoted to administrative positions only to discover that the male administrators earn an average of \$5,000 per year more than their female counterparts. The idea that women need not earn as much as men because they have husbands to support them is outmoded. The U.S. Department of Labor states that 40 percent of the women in the labor force in 1978 had never married, or were widowed, divorced, or separated. Nearly all of the working women were working for compelling economic reasons. The largest group of people living below the poverty level are old women(15).

Even more critical is the basic question of just how willing are men to having their male world invaded by women. Eric Erickson suggests that no doubt there exists among men an honest sense of wishing to save at whatever cost a sexual polarity, a vital tension and an essential difference which they fear may be lost in too much sameness and equality.

The media image of women's successful entry into top level positions is misleading enough to make the white male feel threatened by what they believe to be a flood of female competitors for opportunities that continue to recede over the economic horizon. Women's struggle for equality is viewed as a danger to high standards of society. This idea implies that men are employed based on merit and standards must be lowered to employ women. As long as this idea exists and the economy is unstable, women will not make substantial gains in administration.

And last men have a strong power base supported by the "old boy network". Even with outstanding credentials administrative candidates must have visibility and contacts with the "old boy network" to be included in the chosen few. While many women's networks have been formed the number of women in positions to employ other women are few. With less than one-half of one percent of the superintendents being female opportunities are extremely limited for the employment of female principals.

In an article in American Education (No Room at the Top?, June, 1977) a report of the findings of several research studies suggested that criteria other than task competence and qualifications are employed in the selection of educational administrators. One study of superintendents' backgrounds found that in almost eight out of ten cases, the successful candidate had coached a sport. Another study revealed that men who had been in the military were preferred as school administrators. A study investigating the selection procedures for elementary and secondary school administrators found that the only factor which appeared to correlate significantly to hiring was sex. No valid correlations were found between age, type of position, length of experience, background, or size of school district and the hiring process.

Women have not achieved equality in their ability to influence institutions and to obtain resources. They have need of a powerful support group.

Educational systems can not afford to waste half of its human resources. Overcoming the barriers must be done by men and women together. Any anti-male crusade is doomed to destruction. We all have fathers, husbands, brothers and sons whom we love.

What can be done to improve educational opportunity for women?

1. We need to provide more support for women in training programs. Most faculties in departments of educational administration are male dominated. They therefore identify with and recommend a disproportionate number of men for financial support. Women do not have role models that would provide even an emotional support base on most administrative faculties.

2. Male faculties must provide opportunities for women in training to gain visibility. National Administrative Organizations can also provide this

visibility by electing women to offices at the decision making level. They can provide meetings bringing female administrators together so they can become acquainted with their female colleagues. I am somewhat discouraged when organizations provide compensatory education for women. One frequently utilized method is the placing of women in internship positions. I believe that internships are a vital part of training programs for both men and women. With a preponderance of research revealing that women generally enter training programs with higher Graduate Record Examination scores and graduate with higher grade point averages they certainly do not need compensatory training. The program of study leading to graduation is the same for both men and women. Many women agree this is another way to saying you are an inferior product.

3. Professional organizations and local boards of education can insist that more women serve on selection committees. One frequently sees the same male names on every selection committee for positions in major cities.

4. Announcements of positions should be made known to everyone at the same time. This safe-guards against promising the position before the position is advertised. In other words--the Old Boy Network cannot have first notification. Women are not a part of the informal networks of organizations.

5. School systems and organizations must provide a back-up support for beginning female administrators. Male administrators will lend a helping hand and be sure that new male administrators know how the game is played in a new system. However, women administrators in a system must learn by trial and error. Men will frequently stand back and see if women can "make it". Women who are administrators sometimes become Queen Bees and believe that if they made it without a whole movement you can too or you are just not good enough.

6. We all must provide long range goals for achieving women's equity in education. Many of the efforts have been fragmented and localized. We must develop a consistent action effort and long range goals that will begin to develop a sense of direction and consensus which can enhance our individual and collective efforts.

7. All schools need to reform the education delivery systems so that all students will develop:

--the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and writing which will prepare them for full participation in the society.

--a positive image of self and their potential contribution to the society.

--incremental career planning which can prepare them for meaningful work and contributions to society.

--an understanding of the changes in the world around them and the skills needed for dealing with these changes.

Attitudes are formed in childhood and schools have a responsibility to represent the accomplishments of all racial-ethnic groups and sexes accurately.

Vision, empowerment, and hope are the components of change. We must share a commitment that we will provide these components for ourselves, our colleagues, and the educational agencies which we serve.

When Freud raised his arms to the heavens and said, "Oh God What does a woman want?" there should have been a female reply that said---"The same thing a man wants": The opportunity to be anything I have the potential to be; the right to learn and develop through my failures; the right to be recognized for my successes and the right to love and be loved.

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